

Gonepteryx rhamni L., both male and female, with the usual good crop of Orange-tips *Anthocharis cardamines* L. which breed in my garden. Only a single Common blue *Polyommatus icarus* Rott. and Large Cabbage White *Pieris brassicae* L. has been seen, but the Green-veined Whites *Pieris napi* L. have been very common and on the two occasions recently when I carried out a census they out-numbered the Small White *Pieris rapae* L. by five to one. As I write this note, the second generation of Holly blues *Celastrina argiolus* L. are appearing. This is another regular species breeding in my garden and which had an excellent first generation emergence. A first for the garden has been the Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* L. a few days ago when one flew into the sun-room and settled down to sun itself, in the manner of a vanessid! In the past few days a few more have appeared in the garden. Also now much in evidence have been the number of dragonflies cruising overhead, but never settling long enough to allow me to attempt an identification. Finally today, 15 August, appeared the first Painted Lady.

I feel it is also worth reporting that Chesterton sidings, an almost abandoned railway yard within the City of Cambridge, has had 23 butterfly species recorded on it by Julia Napier in the latest issue of *Nature in Cambridgeshire* (No. 43, 2001). This is more species than occur in any one of the five local Nature Reserves! Unfortunately this is a typical "Brownfield" site, so beloved of our politicians for building on and already developers and our Council have got their beady eyes on it. Fortunately, due to a rare plant, English Nature have an interest, but surely such an excellent habitat should be preserved and the houses built on the huge arable fields which I see in the countryside, which are absolutely lifeless, except for their monoculture crop.— BRIAN O. C. GARDINER, 2, Highfield Avenue, Cambridge CB4 2AL.

On the present scarcity of certain insects always regarded as common

I can fully support the observations of McLeod (*Ent. Rec.*: 114: 201-202) and of Conrad and Woiwod (*Ent. Rec.*: 114: 202) on the drastic decline of certain lepidopterous species universally regarded as common and even abundant; two of the more outstanding being the Small Tortoiseshell butterfly *Aglais urticae* and the Garden Tiger moth *Arctia caja*. I witnessed a striking demonstration, several years ago, that something unusual was happening to the former of them in this area.

Briefly, a compact rather isolated bed of nettles on Woolwich Common near here was found to be seething and heaving with Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars – wave upon wave of them – a species that had long been scarce hereabouts. The resulting butterflies, though numerous enough for a season, fell very far short of what one might expect from such a concourse; probably from having scattered far and wide. They were, I think, the last of their kind I have seen anywhere.

I can cite a somewhat analogous case from the experience of my late friend Dudley Collins: the year before the Heath Fritillary *Melitaea athalia*, became extinct in Shipwrights Wood, Essex, it was commoner and more variable there than he had ever known it before.

To turn to the Garden Tiger: traditionally one of our commonest and best-known moths, it has never in my time and experience been anything but very scarce, and the number of sightings I have had can be “counted on the fingers of one hand” – far fewer than those of its congener *A. villica* (though none of those were near here). I did meet with an *A. caja* flying in the street (Charlton Road) some years ago, and two larvae at different times since, but that is all.

From the above, I conclude that a population explosion bodes no good for a species; a gradual increase, if any, seems far healthier.– A. A. ALLEN, 49 Montcalm Road, Charlton, London SE7 8QG.

Two uncommon ants (Hym.: Formicidae) in urban London

On 8 June 2002, whilst taking some school children on a bug-hunt through Nunhead Cemetery, Surrey (VC 17, O.S. grid reference TQ 3575), I was presented with a plastic tube containing the characteristic workers of *Lasius fuliginosus* (Latreille). A large number of the ants were crawling over several low sycamore branches and although there were a few aphids for them to attend, many more appear to have been on higher branches and seem to have been collecting the spilled honeydew which had dropped down.

About thirty minutes later, one of the children asked me help him collect some tiny ants, which were running up and down a small elm trunk; they were *Lasius brunneus* (Latreille).

Despite having visited Nunhead Cemetery often during the last 17 years, I have never seen either of these species there before. Although *L. fuliginosus* is generally widespread in southern England (Edwards, R. 1997, *Provisional atlas of the aculeate Hymenoptera of Britain and Ireland*, part 1, pp. 22-23) it is a very local species with a complex biology. As a semi-social parasite of a semi-social parasite, it only establishes its colonies in the nests of another ant, *Lasius umbratus* (Nylander) and its near relatives, which in turn establishes its colonies in the nests of the black pavement ant *Lasius niger* (Lin.) or the yellow meadow ant *Lasius flavus* (Fab.). Successful founding of nests is therefore a complex procedure and nests are usually highly localised in the field. I have only previously found it in one London locality – Morden Cemetery (TQ 2367, VC17 – Surrey), where there were several nests in the large black (Italian) poplar trees, on 14.v.1998 and 10.ix.1998.

The nationally scarce (Nationally Notable category A) *L. brunneus* is very localised in the Thames and Severn Valley areas (Edwards, R. 1998, *Provisional atlas of the aculeate Hymenoptera of Britain and Ireland*, part 2, pp. 40-41) but is proving to be widespread in south London. I have found it in considerable numbers in Sydenham Hill and Dulwich Woods (TQ 3372, TQ 3472, VC17 – Surrey) and in Battersea Park (TQ 2876, TQ 2877, also Surrey) and occasionally in Beckenham Place Park (TQ 3870), Mayow Park (TQ 3571) and Downham (TQ 3971 and TQ 3872) all in VC16 – West Kent). Its discovery at Nunhead is not, therefore, altogether unexpected.– RICHARD A. JONES, 135 Friern Road, East Dulwich, London SE22 0AZ (E-mail: bugmanjones@hotmail.com).